

MICHAUD ANNOUNCES FEDERAL FUNDING FOR

Tuesday, July 13 2004

WASHINGTON, DC – Representative Michael H. Michaud today announced that the Fiscal Year 2005 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill contains funding recommendations for his top priority projects in the bill, including the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone, University of Maine Rural Community Innovation Center, Universal Public Information Access Project in Maine, and the Public Broadcasting Association in Maine. This bill is expected to pass the full House of Representatives later today.

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As in years past, the Agriculture Appropriations bill designates those projects that should receive priority funding consideration from the USDA's Rural Development Administration. Typically, USDA follows the funding recommendations outlined by Congress when making decisions about rewarding these competitive grants.

"When the House considers the 2005 Agriculture budget, the funding I requested for these projects will receive a priority designation by the USDA," Michaud explained. "While this is a competitive grant program, these priority designations gives these projects a tremendous advantage during the process." Once this bill passes the House it will then have to be reconciled with a Senate version, passed again by both chambers, and signed by the President. [DETAILS OF PROJECTS FOLLOWS] Aroostook County Empowerment Zone

Congressman Michaud requested \$2 million to help fund ongoing operations of the Aroostook Empowerment Zone (EZ). These funds are critical to maintaining the EZ designation and implementing the mandatory strategic plan. In Fiscal Year 2004, the Aroostook County Employment Zone (ACEZ) obtained federal funding to help maintain the EZ designation and implementation of their strategic plan. Maintaining the EZ designation is critical to businesses accessing the employee tax credits, EZ facility bonds, and other EZ benefits. Without proper funding to implement the strategic plan, the Secretary can revoke designation status for failure to make progress in implementation.

In January 2002, parts of Aroostook County were designated as the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone. The empowerment zone program was created in the early 1990s to aid distressed communities by providing opportunities for growth and revitalization. Today, the ACEZ is one of only 10 rural empowerment zones in the country, and one of only two that are based on population loss.

In his letter to appropriators, Michaud explained, "The Strategic Plan is now almost three years old and must be updated this year to remain in compliance with the EZ rules and regulations. Many organizations are depending on the EZ program to develop and implement plans that will have a positive impact on the economy and the quality of life for county residents."

"This priority designation for the Aroostook County Empowerment Zone is excellent news and gives them a tremendous advantage in the process," Michaud explained. "Obtaining funding is absolutely critical to maintaining this federal designation. I will fight to ensure this remains in the final appropriations bill."

On November 5, 2003, Representative Michaud introduced H.R. 3448, legislation to modify the boundaries for the empowerment zone designation. Due to the boundaries of the current zone, some businesses are left out of the incentives provided to similar businesses just across the street. Michaud's legislation would expand the ACEZ to cover the entire County, and has been referred to the House Ways and Means Committee for consideration.

University of Maine Rural Community Innovation Center

Representative Michaud also requested \$600,000 for the University of Maine Rural Community Innovation Center in Winter Harbor. This funding would help create a resource clearinghouse for rural communities in Maine.

"The Maine Rural Community Innovation Center will develop an on-line clearinghouse of educational, technical and human resources for use by municipal and volunteer community groups throughout Maine—beginning with Winter Harbor and surrounding towns in Hancock County affected by the recent closing of the Winter Harbor naval base," Michaud said.

Rural citizens and communities in Maine and across the country are facing increasingly complex challenges, and this funding would help create a resource clearinghouse for these communities. The online tools will increase citizen participation in civic affairs; engage youth and adults in planning for and investing in their community's future; and build the public's capacity to make informed decisions about community and regional issues.

Universal Public Information Access Project in Maine

Congressman Michaud also requested \$1,000,000 to fund the Universal Public Information Access Project in Maine. This funding would help develop and test a model of universal access to public health and nutrition information. Stage One is devoted to the development and testing of a model, including software and a protocol, which provides the structure and processes for public nutrition and health information to be communicated "The Universal Public Information Access Project is a multi-stage effort, proposed to develop, test, and implement a model of universal access to critically needed public health and nutrition information," Michaud stated. The system will utilize a universal format accessible to all citizens, including those who cannot access and understand print or televised material because they speak English as a second language, have low levels of literacy, and/or have sensory and cognitive impairments. Public Broadcasting Association in Maine Congressman Michaud also secured additional funding to support the Grants to Broadcasting Systems Program, which is administered through the Rural Development agency of USDA. As one of five eligible statewide public broadcasting systems, Maine Public Broadcasting would expect to receive \$1 million of the total national funding level request of \$5 million. "For the 11 years it has received grants from Rural Development, Maine Public Broadcasting has produced outstanding and award-winning programs that provide valuable information to the residents of the state of Maine," Michaud stated. "The programs have featured a variety of rural issues including education, land use, natural resources, childcare, science and history. I am pleased the committee has recommended continued funding to support this service." ###